

# Sand, Silt, and Clay

art by Shirley Beckes

**R**ocks and dirt don't look or feel much alike. But dirt is really just tiny pieces of rock mixed with bits of dead plants, water, and air. Those tiny rocks are called sand, silt, or clay, depending on their size. In dirt, they're usually all mixed together, but you can separate them.



1. Get a large, clean, clear jar with a tight-fitting lid and fill it about halfway with dirt. Take out any big twigs or stones, and break up the large lumps.
2. Fill the jar with water and add a teaspoon of dishwashing soap.

3. Screw the lid on, and shake the jar until everything is mixed.
4. Put the jar down, and wait a minute or two. What do you see?
5. Check the jar again in a few hours. Did anything change? The different sizes of rock should form layers in your jar.



*The smallest bits, the clay, are so tiny they may stay mixed up with the water for several days, making it look cloudy.*



*After a few hours, the next biggest bits, the silt, settle on top of the sand.*

*The biggest, heaviest pieces, the sand, quickly settle on the bottom of the jar.*



Copyright of Click is the property of Carus Publishing and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.